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THE DECLINE OF COMMUNISM IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

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The occupation of Communist Czechoslovakia by forces of the Warsaw Pact came as a shock, not only to public opinion in the Western countries, but to the Communist experts of these countries as well. In respect of its unexpectedness, to be sure, the occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968 is not very different from the Romanian national deviation of 1963, or the flash Hungarian uprising of 1956, or the Comintern expulsion of the Yugoslavs in 1948. In each case it was many months, not to say years, before the origins and the implications of the new upheaval became clear. The present essay is an attempt to contribute, in a small way, to the ex post facto process of clarification of this most recent unscheduled event.

Until the early 1960's, indeed, the Czechoslovak regime appeared to be among the most orthodox and stable in Eastern Europe; it had remained virtually untouched by the wave of destalinization set off by Khrushchev's secret speech of February, 1956. But beginning in 1962, the country suddenly found itself faced with an economic crisis. The rate of economic growth, as measured by percentage increases in Gross National Product, fell off sharply.

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Year	Percentage Increase in Gross National Product ^a
1961	6.8
1962	1.4
1963	-2.2
1964	0.0
1965	2.5

^aRendl, V., and J. Kubik, "The Development of Our Economy in Recent Years," Planovane Hospodarstvi, No. 4, April 1966, as translated in RFE Research: Czechoslovak Press Survey, No. 1789 (89), 14 May 1966, pp. 1-3. The Economist of August 31, 1968 provides a set of figures for Czechoslovak national income. These are -2.2% for 1963, 0.6% for 1964, 3.4% for 1965, 10.8% for 1966, and 8.0% for 1967.

In a capitalist country such a dip in the growth rate would be characterized as an economic recession, and indeed the Socialist economy of Czechoslovakia revealed in these years many of the same symptoms, such as warehouses packed with unsold goods, food lines, and panic buying; the increase in visible unemployment was not as striking, however. Even though recovery was substantial, the recession of the early '60's appeared to set off a very rapid political evolution, reaching a crescendo in 1968, with the removal of the Stalinist First Secretary A. Novotný (January), the abolition of censorship (June) and the occupation of the country by forces of the Warsaw Pact in August.

Our first concern, therefore, is to explain how an economic recession could have had such serious political repercussions. Probably the recession served as a match for non-economic combustibles which had been accumulating

for some time. But the state of the Czechoslovak economy also requires scrutiny.

THE ECONOMIC FACTOR

The immediate cause of the economic stagnation of 1962-65 is to be found in the slow down of bilateral trade within the Eastern market, in part occasioned by a decline in added investment in the other Socialist countries. Being both small and highly industrial, Czechoslovakia is particularly sensitive to changes in foreign markets, something like one-fifth of her Gross National Product being accounted for by foreign trade. Back in the Nalycon days before Hitler, more than 90 per cent of Czechoslovak exports had gone to the capitalist countries of the West, and had consisted primarily of high quality consumers' goods. But under Communism Czechoslovakia, as one of two countries in the Socialist world with a truly sophisticated industry (the other being "East" Germany), had taken on the role of purveyor of machinery and other heavy industrial products to her less developed Socialist allies. In exchange these allies would provide Czechoslovakia with the necessary raw materials, such as iron ore, non-ferrous metals, and oil. As of today, approximately three-fourths of Czechoslovakia's foreign trade is conducted with the Socialist countries and consists primarily of the exchange of machinery for raw materials. Czechoslovakia now acquires 91 per cent of her crude oil, 68 per cent of her iron ore, and some 50 per cent of her bread grains from the East, mostly from the USSR. In return, 65 per cent of Czechoslovakia's exports of

machinery are shipped to the Soviet Union.*

Aside from the general slow down in intra-Bloc trade, Czechoslovakia's new Eastern market was also affected by a series of more immediate disasters. The Quarrel between Soviet Russia and Communist China ended with a virtual severance of trade between Prague and Peking, ending the Czech dream of penetrating the huge Chinese market and leaving Prague stuck with enormously expensive turbo-generators designed to Chinese specifications. The Romanian national deviation brought further trouble; as a proportion of total Romanian imports Czechoslovak machinery dropped rapidly from 50 to 10 per cent. The Russians also began to refuse delivery of various shipments of Czech machinery, on the ominous grounds that they were below world market standards. (In 1966, moreover, the Russians began to take the position that they could no longer deliver raw materials to Eastern Europe at world market prices. The unfavorable conditions under which their extractive industry operated, they asserted, made it necessary for their Socialist trading partners either to pay above-world-market prices for Soviet ore and Soviet oil, or to invest directly in Soviet extractive industry. Since then Prague has granted credits worth a half billion dollars for the development of the Soviet oil industry alone.) The decline in machinery shipments to the East not only precipitated the recession of 1962-65 but it also suggested that, if Prague wished to maintain a high rate of economic growth in the future, Czechoslovakia should

* Comparable figures are given by Lorenc, Jan J. R., "Prague's Economic Bondage," The New Leader, August 26, 1968, pp. 8-11.

reenter the capitalist market on a major scale and necessarily, reduce the degree of her economic dependence on the USSR. Such a shift in the patterns of trade would, however, have political significance.

But the failure of the Eastern market was only the immediate cause of the recession. Much more fundamental was the inappropriateness of the Stalinist command economy to Czech circumstances. Historically speaking, Stalinist central planning had been designed to industrialize backward, agrarian countries, and to industrialize them in a considerable hurry. But in Czechoslovakia Stalinist central planning came near to wrecking havoc. It turned out that under Stalinism the infrastructure of the economy was neglected; the rate of technological innovation fell off; industrial management was of poor quality; the labor force lacked motivation. Above all, Czech wares lost their ability to compete in Western markets. It cost the country two dollars in production and distribution costs to earn one dollar in hard currency. Trade with the West had to be subsidized, to the tune of an estimated 1.6 billion crowns in 1955, and of 5.0 billion crowns in 1963.*

The Czech Communists faced a dilemma. They were impelled to negotiate a massive reentry into the Western market in order to compensate for the declining trading opportunities in the East. But the goods their system produced could not compete in the West. To restore competitive character to Czech products, it would be

* Ibid. At the basic official rate there are 7.20 crowns to the dollar. For Czechs who wish to travel abroad a dollar costs 36 crowns. The black market price is 42 crowns.

necessary to undertake a thorough (and rather un-Marxist) reform of the national economy. It seems to the present writer unreasonable to have believed, as the Czech Marxist-Leninists originally believed, that a modern industrial economy could function optimally if its managers denied the reality of rent, treated capital as a free good, and set prices so arbitrarily that the cost of a ton of coal at the Ostrava pit-head (an extreme but important instance) was seventeen times its purchase price. In any event, the Communists soon found themselves borrowing heavily, if under appropriate ideological disguise, from capitalist economics.

The Czech economists proposed -- they referred to their proposal as the New Economic Model -- to imitate the Yugoslav Marxists and introduce a Socialist market, a hybrid combining state ownership with a restricted play of market forces. Over a period of years the central planning machinery would be dismantled, prices would be permitted to seek their own level, the domestic market would be opened to Western competition, and the management of factories (as distinct from their ownership) would be turned over to men who, regardless of their politics, could make a profit. Factories which did not turn up in the black would be closed, and the temporary unemployment of their workers accepted as the lesser evil. The general direction of economic development would be regulated by the manipulation of such indirect levers as taxation and monetary policy.

It was not long, however, before it became apparent that the introduction of the New Economic Model seriously threatened the power of the party apparatus. It was not

so much that the NEM ran counter to the traditional teachings of Marxism-Leninism, though that was important. It was rather that the emergence of an autonomous class of industrial managers chosen on the basis of ability would deprive the apparatus at local levels of its main employment, the detailed supervision of the enterprise, and would consequently bring about the downgrading or unemployment of large numbers of the faithful. There were other, even less pleasant implications. If managers were granted autonomy in a market situation, should not trade unions be permitted to protect the interests of the working class, even if this involved a restoration of the right to strike? If factory managers should have autonomy, why not collective farm managers? Indeed, if the management of factories, under the general supervision of the party, were turned over to men who knew how to turn a fast crown, perhaps the management of ideas should be given to writers and others professionally concerned with communication. The NEM soon became a political football, conservatives opposing it because of the danger that its implementation would lead to other liberalizing changes, revisionists pushing for it in the hope of changing much more than the economy and bringing into being, perhaps, a new political model. Novotný tried to compromise by accepting economic reform in principle, but withholding the personnel changes necessary to implement it. After heavy infighting he was replaced (January 1968) by a leadership which meant to carry out wide-ranging political reform as the prerequisite not only of market Socialism but of the conciliation of an angry public opinion as well.

It was at this juncture that the Soviet, Polish and

East German media, above all the latter, began to show signs of distress and concern.

Yet there is considerably more to the Czechoslovak crisis of 1968 than the unwanted political consequences of economic reform. One other important factor underlying the crisis is a subtle but nevertheless pronounced change in the Czech (as distinct from the Slovak) national outlook.

THE SECURITY CONSIDERATION

Since 1938 the overriding concern of the Czechs has been national security. After a brief twenty-year existence their new-born republic had been broken up into its constituent national parts by pressure from the ancient German enemy, albeit with the enthusiastic cooperation of the non-Czech populations and the reluctant support of the guarantor great powers Britain and France. Soviet Russia alone gave the appearance of being ready to stand by the beleaguered Czechs.

The Munich Pact was soon followed by another traumatic experience: more than six years of German occupation. At the end of the occupation the rumor was widespread that the Nazis had intended to destroy the Czech nation, physically liquidating one-third, expelling another third, and absorbing the remainder. If there were indeed such a plan the failure of the Nazis to carry it out would be largely explained by the docility and skill of Czech labor, which contributed substantially to the German war effort, and the growing importance of rump Bohemia as an industrial sanctuary from Allied bombing raids. With the defeat of the Germans, and with the help and urging of

the Soviet armies, the Czechs proceeded to turn the tables, e.g., to expel their own German minority, whose defection had made Munich possible, three million of them, and to confiscate their lands, homes and other property. (Incidentally, this expulsion had in itself a deleterious effect on the capacity of Czech industry to produce high quality goods.) Thereafter the Czechs lived (many with guilty consciences) in fear of German reprisal. Out of these experiences -- Munich partition, Nazi occupation, Sudeten German expulsion -- the Czechs drew the conclusion that their national security could be safeguarded only by a close alliance with Slavic Russia. Because the nation's existence was at stake, everything would have to be subordinated to the maintenance and prosperity of this alliance.

With the Communist coup d'etat of February, 1948, the Czech psyche suffered another shock. Except for the Communists, who had a very sizeable following but by no means a majority, the Czechs would undoubtedly have preferred to continue the political arrangement of 1945, which may be described as a system of free elections combined with a national front coalition of all parties in which the Communists, by common consent, were given the role of senior partner. Non-Communist Czechs probably hoped that their country, like Finland, would be vouchsafed domestic autonomy in exchange for strict conformity to Soviet wishes in foreign and military policy. But most of the non-Communists silently acquiesced in the February events, as they were euphemistically referred to, because the alternative seemed to them civil war invoked in open defiance of the protecting power, and because they had

little reason to believe that the West would provide them in 1948 with the help which it had denied them twenty years earlier. In short, the non-Communists for the most part accepted and accustomed themselves to the one-party state as a part of the price they had to pay for national security.

The notion of a Czech industry which would supply ballbearings to the factories of China, Russia and Eastern Europe also fits into the security picture. The Eastern market seemed attractive on strictly business terms. Even the pre-war Czech economy had boasted the famous Skoda works at Pilsen, and the movement of German industry into Bohemia during the Nazi war had considerably broadened the heavy industrial base. It is true that even the Czech Communists would have preferred the assistance of the Marshall Plan in recovering from the effects of war and occupation; also true that a Marshall Plan connection would have done much to preserve the traditional commercial ties with the capitalist economies. But Stalin (July, 1947) forbade the regime to accept such aid, precisely because of its political implications, and the non-Communists passed up in miserable silence what was probably their last opportunity to mobilize the country against the Communists. With Sta'in's veto of the Marshall Plan, the regime took the plunge into the Eastern market. It made of the new economic relationship part of a psychic withdrawal from that West which had not only failed to protect the defenseless Czechs from their German enemies, but had engendered that tidal wave of economic depression which had contributed so much to the coming of the Nazis to power in the first place, and had also helped to erode the

Czech-Sudeten German relationship.

In the 1940's and '50's Czechoslovakia was one of the most orthodoxly Stalinist of the European Communist countries. Indeed, after 1956, the regime successfully resisted destalinization when the Soviet dictator attempted to impose it. It may even be, as some specialists are inclined to think, that Khrushchev therefore sought to remove the Stalinist Novotný and to replace him with a liberalizing R. Barak; in any case Barak, after having been publicly accused by Novotný of treasonous activity, ended up with a long prison term for malfeasance. It was also true that the Prague regime seemed to have little domestic resistance to face. Collectivization was accomplished early and with little overt resistance. The Catholic Church never became a focus of popular opposition, as it did in Yugoslavia, in Hungary, and above all in Poland. The Czech and Slovak intelligentsias seemed relatively immune from the ferment which so thoroughly infected their Polish and Hungarian counterparts after 1953. All in all, outside observers in 1960 had little reason to anticipate that this apparently stolid Stalinist regime was on the eve of a crisis-making metamorphosis.

The Socialist-generated recession of 1962-65 began to put things in a somewhat different light. Czech living standards, except for those of East Germany, the highest in the Socialist world, were obviously threatened. Philosopher Ivan Svitak put it this way:

The cemetery-like quiet of this dictatorship and its well functioning, truncheon-assured respectability seemed to be unassailable from within. Suddenly, the resources which made possible the general policy of bribing the nation by a higher standard of living

failed -- actually it was the economics of the high consumer standard that failed. The sudden failure of the economic structure -- by no means incurable -- was sufficient to bring about a state of insecurity and to provoke a remarkable change of political orientation.*

Svitak is accusing his fellow citizens of gross materialism. But, as with everything Czech, the problem is more complex than that. The threat to living standards, in addition to the loss of civil liberties, was too much. The cost of national security through Soviet alliance now began to seem unreasonable. Economic stagnation crystallized slow changes in perception no one had recognized were underway.

The Czechs were now able to recognize the changes which had transpired in the twenty years since they had embraced (and were embraced by) Soviet patronage. The development of nuclear weapons had made Bohemia much less of a military prize to the great powers, and Soviet protection of less value to a small country like Czechoslovakia. Perhaps equally important for the Czechs, Soviet prestige had also declined, first because of the Sino-Soviet schism, subsequently because of the Cuban confrontation with its negative effect on the Soviet prospects in Berlin, then because of the continued erosion of the Soviet position in Eastern Europe, and finally because of the astonishing success of the West European Common Market, a success which ran counter to almost every basic principle in the Marxist-Leninist book. But more important even than these changes for the Czech national awareness were the shifts which had taken place in the position and the prospects of the Germans.

By 1965 the Czech observer could note that even if East and West Germany were joined together the product of this union would not be a superpower equivalent to the USSR or the USA, but only a state somewhat stronger than a France or a Britain: so extensive had been the changes in the power structure of the world. Furthermore, the Bonn government had become a pillar of the EEC, sacrificing West German agriculture to make the success of the Market possible, placing her newly organized divisions under the command of the NATO headquarters, and otherwise fostering the emergence of a European community. The reconstruction of the shattered West German economy was regarded by world opinion as little short of miraculous. West Germans governed themselves on the whole in an orderly and constitutional manner. In twenty years the bulk of the three million expellees had become fairly well integrated with West German society; it seemed dubious that they would soon be interested in returning to their old homes in the Sudetenland. It was almost as if the Federal Republic had emerged from World War II as a victor power, and the Czechoslovak republic among the vanquished.

Prague, moreover, now needed Bonn's help. Before Czech products could once again compete in Western markets most of the Czech machine parts would have to be replaced with more sophisticated models. (The average Czech textile machine was more than 40 years old!) This advanced equipment was not to be bought in the East, where it was either not available, or in short supply. Prague did not have the hard currency with which to buy it in the West, and the New Economic Model would have difficulty functioning at an optimal level until the new equipment was installed.

Long-term loans were necessary, and in the parlous state of Czech affairs few Western firms would grant such loans without government guarantees. Of the Western governments, Bonn alone had the necessary political motivation. Her new Ostpolitik involved precisely the use of trade and diplomacy as a means of promoting good relations with the governments of Eastern Europe, her long term aim being the isolation (and ultimate overthrow) of the East German regime. The West Germans already had Handelsmissionen in most East European capitals. They had even exchanged ambassadors with the Romanians, whose national deviation they were for practical purposes financing, and with the Yugoslavs, whose association with the Common Market they were sponsoring.

To sum up, in the 1940's and '50's the Czech view of the world had been distorted by a good if understandable case of hysteria, coupled with a deal of Soviet coercion. Stalinism is government by terror and terror is difficult to practice unless it is justified by some overweening foreign danger, real or imagined. By 1962 the German bugaboo was fading, and the Czechs were able to look at the real world again and admit to themselves that it had changed, and that not all the changes had been detrimental to their interests. What had once been a tolerable domestic state of affairs was not increasingly intolerable. What had seemed barely reasonable terms of alliance, even if imposed by the stronger party, now seemed altogether unreasonable. The Czechs of the 1960's still wanted Soviet patronage and protection (they well understood that they were not free to dispense with them). But by 1968 they wished to "renegotiate" the terms of alliance. They

desired in some as yet undefined fashion to democratize their government (many wished to go so far as the restoration of democracy) and they hoped to reduce substantially their economic dependence on the Soviet Union while developing a working relationship with the Bonn Republic in order to make possible the maintenance of high rates of economic growth.

The Soviet Union, urged on by its Polish and East German allies, is exceedingly loath to renegotiate. The men in Warsaw, in Moscow, and above all in Pankow are inclined to the view that either the democratization of the Czechoslovak Communist regime, or the development of economic collaboration between Czechoslovakia and West Germany might set forces in motion which would in the end threaten Communist rule throughout Eastern Europe.

Together with the economic crisis, and the changing Czech appreciation of the German danger, there is a third element which runs all through the Prague spring. Ideologically considered this is the revisionist element. Viewed historically it is rather the restoration of the intelligentsia to their traditional place in Czechoslovak society. Economically, it is the increase of wage and salary differentials and the granting of growing rewards to expertise.

RESTORATION OF THE INTELLIGENTSIA

Under Stalinism, both intellectuals and professionals were downgraded, and the schools which trained them were placed under close party supervision. Academic degrees were abolished. University officials were appointed by the minister of education. The learned journals of the

West were forbidden. Secondary school discipline was imposed at university level. Standards were diluted. A large proportion of the student body was made up of youngsters whose principal accomplishment was birth into working-class or peasant families. Men who wrote for publication, or painted, or otherwise created, hewed to the line of Socialist Realism, in effect serving as little more than regime propagandists. Intellectuals and professionals were also paid less than in the past. If what a typical worker earned is represented by the figure 100, what an average professional made is symbolized by the figure 130. As Planen wrote:

Czech wage egalitarianism is a unique phenomenon unsurpassed anywhere in the world. There is no other country that would put in one and the same income bracket a bus driver and a chairman of the district court of justice, a carpenter and a general practitioner, a turner and a university professor. There is no other country in which a man's qualifications have so small a bearing on his earnings.*

The downgrading of the intellectuals and the professionals of course favored the party apparatus and party activists which was for the most part made up of self-tutored former workers were long on loyalty but short on expertise. At the beginning of the economic reform, approximately two-thirds of all deputy plant managers had no more than an elementary education.

It was entirely natural that when the Czechs could view the outerworld more realistically they should also display a greater realism in managing their domestic

* Quoted by David Halberstam in The New York Times, November 28, 1965.

affairs. Gradually the universities recovered their autonomy and their standards. A law of 1 May 1966 in effect broke with the Soviet model of higher education and attempted to restore the situation of the universities as it existed prior to the coup of 1948. Rectors and deans are again elected by their faculties, though subject to a veto by the minister of education. Academic titles are restored. The faculties determine educational policy. They have free access to Western scholarly literature. Their research function is recognized as a public responsibility and monies earned by research contract are now placed at the university's disposal. Entrance to the university is now open only to those who have completed secondary education. Language requirements have been reinstated and graduate studies begun. The "bourgeois pseudo-science" of sociology has been reintroduced as an academic discipline and in January, 1966, the Central Committee ordered the establishment of an institute of public opinion research as a section of the Academy of Sciences. In the language of the Committee, "the institute will establish what the public knows about a given problem and what it thinks about it, the tenacity with which it sticks to its views, how it would vote on given proposals, etc."* The New Economic Model itself is something of a victory for the professionals, not alone because it is so much a creation of the economists, but also because it envisions a closer correlation between contribution and

* Rude Pravo, January 12, 1966, as quoted in RFE Research: Czechoslovak Press Survey, February 4, 1966, No. 1749 (12, 15, 16), pp. 9-11.

reward throughout the economy.

Increased freedom and autonomy were not limited to academic circles. In the 'sixties writers and artists openly expressed their affinity to and preference for Western culture. Abstract painters began to exhibit their wares in the West. In the repertoire of the Czechoslovak theatre Western plays came to predominate. The film industry won a world-wide reputation for originality and realism. More and more openly Czech and Slovak writers put forward views on major political issues, even when these were not pleasing to the party. At a writers' congress in June, 1967, demands were raised for the abolition of censorship, it being argued that the decline of terror was a reversible provisorium unless institutional guarantees were set up. After the removal of Novotný as First Secretary the censorship offices ceased to function and in June, 1968, censorship was formally abolished, the press regime reverting to the situation which had obtained prior to 1948.

The intelligentsia was in fact seizing the political initiative. Together with an increasing number of allies and colleagues within the party apparatus they put forward a program: abolition of democratic centralism within the party, separation of party and state functions, revival of non-Communist parties, the independence of the judiciary, elections with an element of choice, the organization of interest groups, and many others. The Czech and Slovak writers went further than any of their revisionist predecessors, whether Yugoslav, Hungarian or Polish, in reformulating the liberal ethos and demanding its embodiment in institutions. Take, for example, this excerpt

from the Declaration of the Circle of Independent Writers, published in Literarni Listy, the official organ of the writers' union, on 4 July 1968:

Our nations, whose fate has taught them to appreciate humanity, culture, freedom, and independence, are able and willing to live in a true democracy. As a matter of fact, it is clear that we cannot even approach the ideals of Socialism as long as the latter is interpreted as an antithesis of democracy rather than its extension. In fact, everything seems to indicate that Czechoslovak Socialism will be a true Socialism only if Czechoslovak democracy is true democracy. If all our people are to feel that the economy is really their own, they must have a real, concrete share in its administration; if they are to have a share in the administration of the economy, they must also have a share in the government of the country. Socialism which admits democracy only for some must necessarily be interpreted as Socialism only for some....

We are convinced that a successful development in the direction of democratic Socialism can be achieved only through an extensive plurality of political interests, through programs, activities and organizations, coming freely and naturally into existence, and being mutually independent, while expressing politically the natural historical and social differentiation as well as the differentiation of opinions and interests in the nation. Only by a structuralized system of mutual control of these various political forces and their free competition for the favor of the people in free elections may we guarantee in the future all that we understand by "true democracy" and may be create a permanent barrier against a tendency, immanent in every power, to "cumulate" itself, limit control over itself, and finally degenerate into a more or less disguised form of totalitarianism.*

* RFE Research: Czechoslovak Press Survey, No. 2104 (194), pp. 4-9.

Not all writers took so openly a democratic approach, but it is probably correct to say that, as a whole, the intelligentsia was proposing a new political model to match the NEM, and that this new political model had precious little in common with the dictatorship of the proletariat or the party of the new type. The apparatus, of course, was dead set against the restoration of democracy, but it did favor democratization, if we are permitted this distinction. The men in Moscow were not only fearful lest the apparatus lose control of the situation, as happened in Hungary in 1956, but they were also deeply concerned by the willingness of the Czechoslovak party leadership to experiment with such dangerous expedients as secret ballotings within the Party, the revival of the non-Communist parties within the National Front, and the abolition of censorship.

So far our analysis has been limited to the eight million Czechs, to the difficulties of their highly industrial economy and to their reevaluation of the German danger. The revival of the intelligentsia and the reformulation of the liberal idea is the work of intellectuals from both nations. But it would be wrong to leave the impression that the Slovaks as such represent a major force for liberalization within Czechoslovakia. As befits a backward country, the Slovak party is rather conservative, and even Stalinist in its complexion. Nonetheless, for reasons of their own, the three and one-half million Slovaks played an important roll in the removal of Novotný and the opening of the floodgates of revisionism.

REVIVAL OF SLOVAK NATIONALISM

The Slovaks are profoundly discontented, too, but for very different reasons than the Czechs. Slovak dissatisfaction is more or less the unhappiness of any backward people, especially one dwelling in the immediate proximity of an advanced and sophisticated population. What infuriated the Slovaks was the refusal of the Czechs to recognize them as a distinct and separate nationality. Indeed, the Czechs have tended to look down on the Slovaks as country bumpkins, who with time and education might yet aspire to the proud status of being Czech. Twice the Slovaks have been promised autonomy, once in 1918 . . . again in 1945, and twice these promises have remained wholly or partially unfulfilled. Czech contempt is compounded both by ignorance and by fear that recognition of the Slovaks as a separate nation would only serve to shrink the Czech population from 14 to 10 million souls.

The resurgence of Slovak nationalism is one of the main features of the present crisis. This resurgence began as a campaign for the rehabilitation of the Slovak Communists Gustav Husak and Laco Novomesky, who were tried and incarcerated as national deviationists under Novotný in the mid-'fifties. The liberation and rehabilitation of these two, accomplished in the late 'fifties and early 'sixties, was the Slovak Communist way of demonstrating the existence of a Slovak nation, i.e., Husak and Novomesky were not guilty because they had a right to defend the national interests of their own people. The rehabilitation had a powerful side effect. It forced the removal from public life of Karol Basilek and Viliam Siroky, the Uncle Toms who for a decade had served as the official leaders

of the Slovak party, and placed the party apparatus in the hands of Slovak nationalists. The mere existence of a separate Slovak apparatus thereafter became a crucial weapon in the struggle against Novotný and in his ultimate removal from office.

There was also a Slovak campaign for a reinterpretation of the uprising of 1944. This event, the men in Bratislava maintained, was much more important than the official Communist version made it out to be. The rebellion was not organized and led by Communists alone, but was a Slovak national undertaking. On this point there was open contention with President Novotný, such Slovak media as Bratislava Pravda and, more particularly, Kulturny Zhivot, now being out of Prague's control. The point the Slovaks were making was plain to everyone. The Czechs had done little to resist the Germans. The assassination of Heydrich had had to be carried out by parachutists dispatched by the exile government in London, which was worried lest the passivity of the Czechs adversely affect the bargaining position of the government at the conclusion of hostilities. By pointing to the risks they had taken and the casualties they had suffered in 1944, the Slovaks were staking out a claim to equal status. The fact that Alexander Dubček was severely wounded in the uprising, and his brother killed, has its special significance.

More recently the Slovaks have begun a third campaign, this time for the reorganization of Czechoslovakia as a federal state. The Czechs have very recently agreed to such a reorganization in principle, but there remain wide divergencies of view as to mechanics. Meantime the Slovaks have for the first time in the history of

Czechoslovakia been providing the political leadership for the state as a whole. In the early stages of the present crisis, rebel Slovak journals, carrying the essays of Slovak revisionists like Ladislav Mnačko and Michal Lakatos who proclaimed the doctrine that the writers were the conscience of the nation, spearheaded the revisionist attack. This was before their Czech colleagues had managed to loosen the bonds of censorship. In the latest stages a Slovak has been elevated to the position of First Secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. Few events could do more to reconcile the Slovaks to partnership with the Czechs.

The causes of ferment in Czechoslovakia were deep-rooted, and their potential effect was far-reaching. The establishment of a Socialist market and the federal reorganization of the state involved structural changes in both the economy and the government of the country. Beyond these changes, which had the official placet of the Warsaw Pact powers, a commercial rapprochement with West Germany was in the offing; this would involve substantial dependence on Bonn and a corresponding reduction in Soviet economic influence. A free press was not only in existence but had been made a matter of law. Beyond this Prague was evidently proceeding to some form of political pluralism. It is doubtful that the Dubček leadership would have permitted a return to a multiparty system. Aside from the obvious unwillingness of Moscow to tolerate such an outcome, as illustrated by Soviet intervention in Hungary in 1956, Dubček must have known that free elections would have removed the Communists from power. Once he had rid the Central Committee of the Stalinist diehards, a consummation

to be achieved at an extraordinary party congress summoned for September, the First Secretary would very probably have taken measures designed to discourage the advocates of democracy and to emphasize the distinction between democracy and democratization. But pluralism of some less blatant sort there probably was going to be. Aside from the free press, in itself a prerequisite of pluralism, there was probably going to emerge an independent judiciary in addition to a national parliament which was something more than a rubber stamp. The Communist party itself would pay more attention to the demands of the other members of the national front and the public would have been permitted some choice among parliamentary and national committee candidates on election day. Perhaps we should speak of interest aggregation within the framework of a single party system, although the mechanism by which aggregation was to take place still had to be worked out.

As early as the Dresden conference (23 March), to which Dubček and his colleagues were hastily summoned by the Warsaw Pact powers and asked to give an accounting, the Soviet leaders made clear their acute concern and even distress with developments in Czechoslovakia. Nor is it difficult to explain the Soviet reaction.

THE CONFLICT WITH SOVIET INTERESTS

To begin with, the establishment of a close working relationship between Bonn and Prague seemed to the Soviets to threaten a further marked erosion of their control and influence in Eastern Europe generally. As has been mentioned the West Germans were already in large part financing the Romanian deviation, and sponsoring Yugoslav

association with the Common Market. Subsequent to Romanian recognition of West Germany, only heavy pressure had prevented Budapest and Sofia from exchanging ambassadors with Bonn. While intra-Bloc trade was tending to stagnate, West Germany's trade with Eastern Europe was growing steadily, in absolute value increasing ten times between 1950 and 1967.* If Czechoslovakia were permitted to reequip its industry with German machinery and German financial help, there would be no holding back the others, all of whom stood to profit substantially from German technology and German credits. In the course of a few years the Soviet Union would be faced with a situation in which, de facto, it had in some considerable measure to share control of Eastern Europe with the Federal Republic.

Worse than that, the development of good relations between Czechoslovakia and West Germany would make clear to everyone that the Czechs had revised their view of the German danger. Yet both the Ulbricht regime in Germany and the Gomulka regime in Poland were heavily dependent on the maintenance of the fiction that the Federal Republic was Nazi-dominated and revenge-seeking. The Czech action thus threatened the stability of both of these regimes, which explains why Pankow and Warsaw probably took the lead in advocating military intervention. In Poland the nationalist faction of M. Moczar was waiting in L. wings,

* From a table prepared from official sources by William E. Griffith and entitled Table III: Turnover (export-import) Trade of the Federal Republic of Germany with selected European countries, with Europe as a whole and with the world during 1936, 1950-67 in millions of RM/DM. Professor Griffith's courtesy in making the table available is appreciated.

determined to replace the Gomuka group and to embark on a program of improved relations with Bonn in order to increase Poland's room for maneuver in the foreign policy field. The position of East Germany was especially threatened, since, in the event of a Prague-Bonn rapprochement, she faced isolation in the one part of the world where she had the right to expect support. Already affected with a severe case of fragility, the Pankow regime might well be made a wasting asset by the triumph of the Ostpolitik.

Thus it appeared to the Soviets that their entire position in Eastern Europe was about to be turned. But there was a second threat in the Czechoslovak situation, from the Soviet point of view. This was the danger embodied in the free press in particular, and the notion of interest aggregation in general; to put it in Marxist terms, the threat to the leading role of the Communist Party. It is not generally realized, but the abolition of censorship in one Socialist country comes close to the abolition of censorship in all. Czech and Slovak publications circulate throughout Eastern Europe and in any case any items of interest carried by these publications will be broadcast throughout the area by Western radio. The trial of Sinyavsky and Daniel was meant to teach the Soviet literati that the regime would not tolerate publication abroad, precisely because such publication would end up reaching the Soviet audience by way of Western broadcasts and smuggled literature, and thus would imperil the institution of censorship as a whole. But what the Czechoslovak press published during its brief period of freedom went far beyond anything Sinyavsky and Daniel had had in mind; they no doubt never dreamed of writing that the Soviet security

police had probably murdered Jan Masaryk on Stalin's orders, or that the NKVD had engineered the trial of Rudolph Slansky and his "accomplices." Of course the Soviet Union could extend its jamming activity to Czech and Slovak broadcasts and forbid the entry of materials printed in those languages. East Germany had already begun to jam broadcasts from Prague intended for the German minority in Bohemia and, in the bargain, had banned the newspaper published by Prague for this minority. But the spectacle of the Communist countries putting ideas emanating from Communist Czechoslovakia in the same category as ideas coming from capitalist states, would open the Soviet system to ridicule. Furthermore, it would be difficult for the Soviet leaders to deny their own restless intelligentsia a free press, if this were vouchsafed to the colonial Czechs. And what of the domino effect? If there were a free press in Czechoslovakia, how long would it be before the Hungarian writers and journalists demanded the abolition of censorship, or the Polish? What applies to the institution of censorship probably also applies to such cherished Soviet practices as democratic centralism and the use of trade unions, youth organizations and the like as transmission belts. One feature of a Communist regime which distinguishes it from other totalitarian dictatorships is its extraordinary sensitivity to the policies and practices of its fellow regimes. Subsequent to his arrest and reinstallation, Alexander Dubček publicly confessed that he and the other Czechoslovak leaders had made the mistake of underestimating the impact of events in Prague on the other Socialist countries.

NEGOTIATION AND CONFRONTATION

Beginning with the Dresden conference in late March the Soviet and Czechoslovak leaderships entered into a period of confrontation and negotiation. Each side put forth characteristic arguments. The Czechoslovaks repeatedly affirmed their loyalty to the Warsaw Pact and their belief in Socialism. Indeed, they seem to have argued that their domestic reforms were meant to save Socialism from the heritage of Stalinism, by making Socialism acceptable to the broad masses of the population. If collaboration with West Germany were unacceptable, then let the USSR loan Prague the hard currency necessary to cover an emergency list of machinery imports. The Czechoslovaks proposed a figure of \$440,000,000. But this sum was five times greater than the largest hard currency loan Moscow has ever made (\$85,000,000 to East Germany in 1957) and represents perhaps a fifth of current Soviet gold reserves. Since a loan of this dimension appeared out of the question, the Czechs no doubt hoped they would be entitled to shop in the West for any part of this total the Soviets were not willing to advance. The Czechoslovaks also invoked at regular intervals the equality, sovereignty and independence of all Socialist states; their words must have had for Soviet ears a Romanian-like ring.

For their part the Soviets accused Dubček and his colleagues of underestimating the strength of counterrevolutionary forces in their country and of taking serious risk of losing control. The Soviets tried to make it clear that a return to the situation before 1948 would never be tolerated. For example, Pravda viciously denounced T. G. Masaryk, the founder of the Czechoslovak Republic,

accusing him, among other things, of having subsidized counter-revolutionary elements in the Russian civil war of 1917-21. The Soviets very probably demanded the right to station a couple of divisions on the Western frontier of Bohemia, where they could "keep an eye on the German revanchists." When Dubček insisted that the Czechoslovak army was more than adequate for the defense of this frontier, the Soviets insisted on carrying through a Warsaw Pact command-and-staff exercise which had been previously scheduled for Czechoslovakia but which had been postponed at the request of Prague owing to the delicate political situation in the country. Under cover of this exercise Moscow surreptitiously introduced as much as a division of Soviet troops in the country in late June, and then proceeded, on one excuse or another, to delay their withdrawal until after the Bratislava confrontation in early August. Since the Czechoslovak leaders did not alter course, Moscow mobilized what turned out to be some 35 divisions of Soviet, East German, Polish, Hungarian and Bulgarian troops in areas immediately adjacent to the Czechoslovak frontier. They clearly hoped that this enormous pressure would be enough, but they were prepared to occupy the country if it were not, and they intended to intervene before the situation veered out of control, as it had in Hungary in October, 1956.*

The occupation of Czechoslovakia on the night of

* Many of the arguments presented during the negotiations appear in the letter of the five Warsaw Pact powers addressed to Prague on July 18 and in the Czechoslovak reply of the same date. The texts are to be found in The New York Times, July 19, 1968, pp. 12-13.

20-21 August by more than 600,000 Warsaw Pact troops reflected the judgment of the Kremlin that either the Dubček leadership was no longer in control of the situation, or that it was bent on implementing policies of an intolerable nature. The occupation did not, however, put an end to the negotiations, as many had thought. These continued, with the difference that the Soviet side now talked pistol in hand.

Indeed, the Czechoslovak negotiators still possessed certain assets. Perhaps the greatest of these was an altogether unprecedented national unity. A poll of Czech and Slovak travellers, taken by Radio Free Europe shortly before the invasion, suggests that already 98 per cent of the population supported Dubček and the Action Program. A comparable polling, taken inside the country by the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences after the invasion, showed that 99 per cent of the population had full confidence in the First Secretary.* Even among the Czech and Slovak Stalinists the Soviet high command could not find a sufficient number of collaborators to form a new government. Oldřich Svestka, the very conservative editor-in-chief of Rude Pravo, publicly denied a rumor that he had been among those who had asked the Soviet Union to intervene. He had not, he said, been a traitor to his country! The result was that the Soviet authorities ended up dealing with that same Alexander Dubček whom they had shortly arrested, placed in manacles, and publicly denounced for treason to the cause of Socialism. Virtually the whole of

*"The Height of Dubček's Popularity," RFE Research: Audience and Public Opinion, September 1968, 2 pp.

the former leadership returned to their posts, at least for the time being, even including Foreign Minister Jiri Hayek, whose Jewish origin the Soviet press had revealed while declaring him persona non grata. On the other hand, the very degree of this support creates something of a problem for Dubcek, since it limits the extent to which he can make concessions to his Soviet counterparts. His inability to bridge the gap between Czechoslovak expectations and Soviet demands was the immediate cause of the occupation.

In addition to the asset of unprecedented national unity there is also the fact that the Soviet leaders need a viable Czechoslovak regime, and the sooner the better. The political cost of the occupation is very high and would become even greater if Moscow were forced to resort to direct military government. The longer the occupation endures, the more it will reveal the weakness of the Soviet position in Eastern Europe and the near bankruptcy of Soviet policy in this crucial area. No other population has been as pro-Soviet in the post-war period as the Czech. No other population has produced such a high Communist vote in a free election (more than two-fifth of the ballots cast in 1946). Few other regimes can boast such an orthodox record, or have played such a role in the industrialization of Eastern Europe, or have contributed so heavily to the Soviet overseas aid program. If it is necessary to intervene militarily in this country, when in fact there was not the slightest indication of disorder in the streets, how fragile must be the situation of the other, Soviet-oriented regimes in Eastern Europe? Indeed, the Soviets are revealing great sensitivity with regard

to the occupation. They demand the removal of anti-Soviet signs from public places in Czechoslovak cities. They forbid the public media to employ such terms as "occupation" or to make any criticism whatever of the occupying powers. They even insist that Prague issue an official announcement declaring that the Western border of the country had been left undefended, thus making necessary the "friendly" help of the Warsaw Pact states. In the long run a viable regime in Czechoslovakia must be one with a successfully functioning economy, one with a reasonably high growth rate. The negotiations for a hard currency loan have been resumed. Will not Moscow have to be more generous than before? Will she not have to pump subsidies into the ailing Czech economy from time to time? Will she deny to Prague the right to seek some additional hard currency credits in the West?

The Czech and Slovak Communists, furthermore, are not without support from within the ranks of Socialism. Their cause will be favored by the revisionist writers in the Soviet Union, where the Communist hierarchy has already launched a new program combining patriotic appeals with renewed emphasis on ideological orthodoxy. The Czechoslovak cause, furthermore, has already received public support from the deviant Romanian and Yugoslav regimes, in a strange revival of the Little Entente of the interwar period. Bucharest and Belgrade, while playing their cards closer to the chest since the invasion took place, will surely use what influence they have to reduce the length and severity of the occupation. Perhaps more influential will be the French and Italian parties, whose electoral prospects have been severely damaged by the

invasion and who, if they are not given relief, may end up organizing a West European grouping of Communist parties, or even disassociate themselves from their Soviet mentor. The conference of Communist parties which the Soviets had planned to summon in November, for the purpose of denouncing the Chinese heretics, has probably been killed by the Czechoslovak affair. There is, in short, a not inconsiderable pro-Czechoslovak party within the Socialist camp.

Of less importance, but still significant, is the fact that Dubček will have the backing of public opinion in the West. In the West the Czechs have a reputation for being a truly civilized and democratic people, who deserve much better from their Socialist allies than they have got. Moscow doubtless remembers the effect of the Prague coup of 1948, which served to initiate the worst period of the cold war by convincing even left-wing intellectuals in the West that it was not possible to reach compromise agreements with the Kremlin. While the occupation of 1968 will not produce a return to the cold war, it will slow down U.S. -Soviet negotiations on key issues, postpone West German signature of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, interfere with cultural exchange, and the like. West Germany in particular will remain disturbed by the presence of so many additional Soviet divisions immediately adjacent to her eastern frontier.

THE OUTLOOK

Over the next two years or so we are likely to witness an endless series of negotiations, confrontations and partial compromises. But already the vague outlines of a modus vivendi are perceptible. The Soviets will gradually

withdraw their troops, but they will insist that at least two divisions remain stationed in Western Bohemia, in order to defend it against German "aggressors." The real purpose of these divisions, of course, will be the intimidation of the Czechs. They will serve as a guarantee that the government in Prague will not again trespass into the realm of the impermissible. The two divisions will probably be supplemented by some scores of Soviet "advisers" stationed with the Czechoslovak security and military forces. These advisers will not actually proffer advice; they will rather report to Moscow any signs or portents of infraction of the limits imposed.

The Soviets will also insist that there be no tampering with the leading role of the party. They will see to the imposition of an effective censorship over public media, i.e., over the intellectuals, though they will not be able to prevent a deal of double talk and artful innuendo. They may tolerate an avant-garde theater, since theatre audiences tend to be small and elitist in character, but it seems doubtful that Czech cinema can continue to follow its presently original and creative path. If the defection of intellectuals and artists to the West continues at a good pace, the frontier will be closed, though the tourist trade as such will not be interfered with. While the Soviets will not object to more frequent sessions of parliament or electoral lists with more candidates than seats to be filled, they will probably veto any substantive changes in the party statutes or any reorganization of mass organizations, e.g., the Communist Youth, into regional or local groupings.

In all probability there will be no exchange of

ambassadors between Prague and Bonn, nor any major influx of West German credits or capital. Rather Prague will take the position that reconciliation with Bonn is not possible until Bonn has recognized Pankow.

The above listing represents a series of major defeats for the Czech and Slovak peoples and their negotiators. But the length of this list and the importance of the individual items should not be allowed to obscure the very real concessions which Dubček and his colleagues will probably be able to extract from the Russians. First, and most importantly, there will probably be no return to terror. Except for advisers, the Soviet security forces will be withdrawn and the Czechoslovak police will not be permitted arbitrary arrests, the use of torture, or the mounting of show trials. (Indeed, there will be no punishment of Novotný nor any "persecution" of the conservatives generally, though these men will not be permitted to hold high office.) As a substitute for a free press, the Czechs and Slovaks will have freedom of conversation, a more important factor in the normalization of life than outsiders generally realize. The universities will no doubt retain their newly-won autonomy and their improved standards, and faculty will have access to the learned literature of the West while cultural exchange will be continued on a selective basis. A federal constitution will probably be adopted. That had already been agreed to in principle by the Czechs, who are gradually coming to the realization that the Slovaks are a distinct people and even have a special contribution to make to the common future. This, in itself, is progress.

Of perhaps equal importance with the maintenance of

Socialist legality will be the pursuance of economic reform. This is not only a necessity of the high standard of living is to be saved, but it will also provide a safe outlet for the frustrations and the pent-up energies of the Czechs, who will feel that in the long run the development of a Socialist market can also serve as a platform for improved political institutions. Perhaps workers' councils will spread and become firmly rooted. In the immediate sense, the living standard will be buoyed up by Soviet subsidies: a sizeable hard-currency credit on easy terms, deliveries of usable goods against the large-scale active balances which the Czechs have built up in Comecon trade, more favorable terms on raw materials' deliveries, and the like.